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February 18, 2004

Harv Forsgren
Regional Forester
U. S. Forest Service
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 85102

Dear Mr. Forsgren:

As you are aware, Arizona has been hit hard by the bark beetle epidemic. Nearly 1 million acres of forest have been lost to the beetle with no end to the devastation in sight. This situation has become an increasing hazard for our state's utility corridors, where dead trees are now in danger of collapsing onto utility lines, creating both a severe fire danger and the potential for outages.

I am writing to you because while many of these dead and dying trees are located on Forest Service and BLM land, our state's utilities – and potentially our ratepayers – are being forced to bear the cost of keeping the dying trees from affecting power lines.

For instance, I have been informed by the Arizona Public Service Company, Arizona's largest electric utility, that it has recently concluded that 250 miles of its lines are within beetle ravaged forestland, and that it will have to spend \$34 million over the next three years cutting down 748,586 dead trees that threaten these lines. Cutting near utility corridors has already commenced in areas around some of our most prized cities and towns, including Prescott, Payson, Pine, Strawberry, Groom Creek and Oak Creek Canyon.

The very real threat that these trees pose to our mountain communities necessitates that money be spent on clearing the utility corridors, begging the question "who pays?"

Funds for cutting near utility corridors

It is my belief that costs associated with keeping our federal forests healthy should be borne by the federal government, not the state of Arizona or its ratepayers. This includes the cost of cutting down dead trees located on federal land that are in danger of falling into utility corridors. I urge you to assign federal dollars for this purpose. In 2003, five million dollars (\$5,000,000) was appropriated by FEMA at the request of the director of the Department of Agriculture to protect utility corridors in California, establishing precedent for this.

Harv Forsgren
February 11, 2004
Page two

Cutting teams in utility corridors

The Forest Service currently has a prohibitive permit process for utility cutting teams in the forest during high fire season for fear of the cutting teams starting a fire. However, these cutting teams are seeking to prevent fires caused by power lines downed by falling trees and should be allowed to continue their work throughout the year.

Eliminate the charge for cutting wood in utility corridor areas affected by bark beetle

Finally, the Forest Service can help defray the cost of clearing these dead trees by temporarily suspending the fee it charges for cutting trees in federal forests. It makes no sense to charge utilities a fee for performing a service that the Forest Service would otherwise be required to conduct.

I hope you will act speedily on these requests. The past two fire seasons have not been kind to Arizona, and it is our mutual responsibility to do all we can to suppress the danger of additional catastrophic fires.

Sincerely,



Kris Mayes
Arizona Corporation Commissioner

Cc: Dale Bosworth
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